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ABSTRACT

StoryWeb is a teaching technique that combines elements of the short story and the Internet to provide an interactive simulation for students using differentiated content, product, and process. This paper describes one StoryWeb unit and indicates how one could implement the unit in a middle school U.S. History course. A StoryWeb unit uses the short story elements of setting, characterization, and critical incidents to develop a context in which the events of history unfold like the plot of a story. The paper presents a unit on the American Revolution in which students learn the historical setting and people, read the book "The American Patriot," and conduct research on the Internet through WebQuest. (Contains 13 notes.) (BT)

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Developing StoryWeb Units that Integrate the Internet and Social Studies

Presented by Renay M. Scott, Ph.D.

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Abstract

StoryWeb is a teaching technique that combines the elements of a short story and the Internet to provide an interactive simulation for students using differentiated content, product and process. This article describes one StoryWeb unit and provides the reader with resources to implement the unit in their middle school American History course.

Introduction

StoryWeb is a teaching technique that combines the elements of a short story and the Internet to provide an interactive simulation for students using differentiated content, product and process[1]. StoryWeb is a variation of the Storypath strategy originating in Scotland and developed in the United States by Margaret McGuire[2]. A StoryWeb unit utilizes the short story elements of setting, characterization, and critical incidents to place the learner into a setting so they can experience the events of history, unfolding like the plot of a story. Using the Internet students engage in WebQuests[3] to access primary and secondary sources to engage in historical inquiry.

An American Revolution StoryWeb

This StoryWeb on the American Revolution was designed for middle school students, but can be adapted for high school students. The unit begins with an anchoring activity where students are introduced to the historical setting and people. In this StoryWeb unit students are introduced to colonial life through reading the book entitled *A Young Patriot.*[4] Other resources can be used in place of this book[5]. After gaining an overview through the opening activity, the learner is placed into their own

story, by assuming a character they believe could have lived during this era. They do this by creating a visual representation of the character by drawing a picture, creating a paper doll, or molding a clay bust. Next, students name their character, and give them a personality by writing either a bio-poem, character sketch, or character web.

To begin the story, the teacher introduces the first critical incident, a town meeting. The town meeting was a common form of socialization and governance during colonial times. During the first town meeting, each student introduces his or her character to the other Lexingtonians. The citizens also elect a governor and town crier. The characters created by the students evolve as the StoryWeb unit unfolds through critical incidents and Internet based inquiry. The students are instructed to approach the remainder of the unit in character.

Students next pick a vocation, build a home and engage in research about life and culture in Lexington through a WebQuest[6]. In the WebQuest students work in small groups and visit Internet sites gaining information about trades and occupations, homes and places, life style and culture, people and government. Students prepare a presentation in which they tell more about their character's family, home and occupation during the WebQuest. Each member of the group keeps a journal in which they describe, in character, what they learned and experienced about life in Lexington. To summarize their understanding of the historical place, the citizens of Lexington create a frieze or mural to depict what they have learned about culture, government, occupations and geography. Their mural serves as a visual reminder of the place where the plot of the unit will unfold.

With the characters and the setting created, students experience the critical incidents that make up the heart of the StoryWeb unit. For this unit the essential events include the Battle of Lexington, the drafting of the Declaration of Independence and the Surrender at Yorktown. Students are told that throughout the next couple of weeks as they engage in research about the War for Independence that the town will hold meetings

to discuss, debate and resolve problems that faced Lexington during the American Revolution. The student elected town crier introduces each of these critical incidents.

The second town meeting is held to introduce the beginning of the War for Independence. The town crier reads a letter from Joseph Palmer[7] describing the events in Lexington on 19 April 1775, when the War for Independence begins. Students are told that they need to determine how the war begins and who is to blame. In small groups, students are given several primary source documents[8] and have to rank them for credibility. These groups discuss what criteria historians use to evaluate sources, then evaluate the primary and secondary source documents. Last, each student is asked to write an account of what they actually think happened on19 April 1775 in Lexington that led to the beginning of the War for Independence.

Students are now asked to pick sides. Some students join the colonists in their struggle for Independence while others remain loyal to Great Britain. In small groups students are asked to gain support for their side in the war. Those remaining loyal to the king are instructed to design posters and write pamphlets and letters persuading colonists to remain loyal to the King, while those joining the colonist are instructed to design posters recruiting people to fight against the king.

While the plot unfolds during town meetings, each student engages in historical inquiry to learn more about the War for Independence. In small groups students participate in a second WebQuest about the battles and military life. Those students joining the colonists focus their research on colonial life and soldiers during the War, while those students remaining loyal to Great Britain focus their research on the Loyalists and British soldiers during the War[9]. Students share what they have learned through an oral presentation that includes visual aids they created such as a map and flag representing the battle they chose to research. In addition, each student keeps a journal or writes a newspaper article about their battle written from their character's perspective.

While students are researching the battles of the War, a third critical event is introduced. The town crier calls the citizens of Lexington together to debate the reasons for joining the War for Independence. Students are given several primary source documents written during this time to examine for reasons given by colonists to engage in this war[10]. Using this information, students engage in a debate about why they should declare their independence from Great Britain. To summarize their position each student writes a persuasive letter to a fictious friend or family member explaining why they have joined the Patriots or remained loyal to the King.

To bring the StoryWeb unit to resolution, the final critical incident is introduced. The town crier calls the citizens of Lexington to order in another town meeting. Here the town crier reads a diary entry of Ebenezer Denny, an eyewitness to the surrender of Cornwallace to Washington at Yorktown in 1781[11]. Students are instructed to assume the role of a newspaper reporter investigating the events. Students investigate the surrender by engaging in one last WebQuest in which they access primary and secondary sources about the Surrender at Yorktown[12].

The final assessment of the unit is an autobiography each student prepares about their character. The autobiography includes three chapters. The first chapter is about the character's family and life in Lexington. The second chapter is about their character's role in the War for Independence and the last chapter is about their character's participation in the Surrender at Yorktown.

Such a unit engages students personally in living history. Differentiating content, product and process enhances the learner's motivation by increasing their choice and control over their own learning. The assumption of characters assist students in gaining perspective and empathy as they create their own understanding[13] of the events of the War for Independence.

[1] Tomlinson, C. (1999) *Differentiated Instruction*, Alexandria, Va: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

[2] McGuire, M. (1997). Taking a Storypath Into History, *Educational Leadership*, pp. 70-72.

[3] To learn more about WebQuests: http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/admin/tlapages/wq_wq.htm.

[4] Murphy, J. (1996). *A Young Patriot: The American Revolution as Experienced by One Boy*. New York: Clarion Books.

[5] The following resources can also be used: Fast, H. (1970). *April Morning*, Bantam Books; Forbes, E (1968). *Johnny Tremain*, Dell Publishing; Osborn, M.P. (2000). *American Revolution on Wednesday*, Random House Books.

[6] http://www.ehhs.cmich.edu/~rmscott/coloniallife.html.

[7] Egger-Bovet, H.; Smith-Bbaranzini, M.; Sanchez, B.; Rawls, J.J. (1994): *Book of the American Revolution*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., p. 47.

[8] Scheurman, G. (1998). Revisiting Lexington Green. *Social Education*, 62(1), pp. 10-18.

[9] http://www.ehhs.cmich.edu/~rmscott/militarylife.html

[10] http://www.ehhs.cmich.edu/~rmscott/independence.html

[11] http://odur.let.rug.no/~usa/D/1776-1800/war/denny.htm

[12] http://www.ehhs.cmich.edu/~rmscott/yorktown.html

[13] Wiggins, G. and McTighe B., (1998). *Understanding By Design*. Alexandria, Va: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.